Oh, have you ever loved?

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/24208717.

Rating:
Teen And Up Audiences

Archive Warning:
Major Character Death

Categories:
Gen, Other

Fandom:
The Penumbra Podcast

Relationships:
Benzaiten Steel & Juno Steel, Mick Mercury & Juno Steel & Sasha Wire, Rita & Juno Steel, Juno Steel/Diamond (The Penumbra Podcast) (past), Juno Steel & Alessandra Strong, Peter Nureyev/Juno Steel

Characters:
Juno Steel, Benzaiten Steel, Mick Mercury, Sasha Wire, Rita (Penumbra Podcast), Diamond (Penumbra Podcast), Alessandra Strong, Peter Nureyev, Brock Engstrom, Valencia (Penumbra Podcast), Miasma (Penumbra Podcast)

Additional Tags:
Alternate Universe - Soulmates, Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence, Platonic Soulmates, Hurt/Comfort, Character Study, Implied/Referenced Abuse, Canon-Typical Violence, the death is ben spoiler, Injury, Panic Attacks, Cheating, A season 1 rewrite of sorts, Implied/Referenced Drug Use, Implied/Referenced Alcohol Abuse/Alcoholism

Language:
English

Collections:
The Penumbra Minibang 2019-2020

Stats:
Published: 2020-05-16 Words: 16,068 Chapters: 6/6

Oh, have you ever loved?

by Crykea

Summary

Juno Steel has never been used to seeing very many colours. He's far to used to seeing people come and go from his life both with and without colours to try to get too attached to anyone. Everyone has colours that fade don't they? Juno should be used to it in his line of work.

Notes

The lovely art in this fic was done by Charles @tinpear on instagram and Milo @thewiredgalaxy on twitter, tumblr, and instagram! It was a joy to work with them and I hope you enjoy this little story!!!

Sarah Steel/Monster's Reflection related domestic abuse begins after the section where Ben pulls out his schoolwork to show Juno and ends at the end of that section where Rita brings Juno to her house.

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1

Juno knew from a young age, that the world came in shades of yellow, gold, and grey. He and Benzaiten learned about the colours one night when Mom was at work, and they had snuck out of their bedroom to watch streams while eating popcorn the babysitter had brought over. On the streams, there were couples who would do gross things like kiss, and mean things like fight, but what Juno and Benzaiten thought was interesting, was the colours the characters always talked about.

“Shamar,” A tall man on screen said softly, “We can’t keep meeting like this.”

Benzaiten laughed behind his hand and kicked at Juno’s legs, only laughing harder when Juno through a kernel of popcorn at him.

“But, Kendrick, you gave me my colours.” A shorter man who was leaning against a bar cried dramatically. “Don’t you know? That means we’re… we’re soulmates. How do you expect me to leave you like this?”

Benzaiten laughed again at the tension on screen. Benzaiten would always stick his tongue out at the screen when they watched these shows. It was easier to just talk about your problems so the problems wouldn't have to happen, he'd say. When Juno tried to shush him, he jumped off the couch to stand in front of his twin. Juno grumbled at Benten as he shoved another fistful of popcorn into his mouth, trying to launch himself to the other side of the couch so that he could still see the screen. He watched as his brother took a deep, schooling breath before falling back to sprawl over the coffee table, similar to how Shamar was leaning against the bar in the stream. Ben dramatically pressed the back of his hand to his forehead, reaching his other hand out towards Juno.

"Juno, we can't keep meeting like this." He stage-whispered, a grin flickering over his face as he watched Juno visibly strain to hold his glower on his face, "You gave me a colour so that means we're…" He paused, widening his eyes for effect and clutching his fist to his chest, " *soulmates* ."

Juno snorted and rolled his eyes, before hopping off the couch to join

in the fun. He held a scandalized hand to his chest.

“But, Benten, we can’t be!”

“Why not?”

“We’re... siblings!” Juno put a hand over his mouth to hide a laugh.

“Don’t be an idiot! Soulmates can be between friends and family too,” Ben said, giving up the act to slug Juno in the shoulder. In moments, the two of them were rolling all over the floor, pinching each other’s forearms and tugging on hair. The play-fighting didn’t stop until the two of them rolled too aggressively into the glass top coffee table, and Juno cracked his head against the leg of it. Laughing still in little puffs of breath, Juno clutched at his head while Ben worriedly poked at the soon-to-be-bruised area only causing Juno to flinch away. The two of them sat panting on the ground as they tried to catch their breath, all a tangle of limbs on the floor. The holoscreen behind them long forgotten adding white noise to their thoughts. Their babysitter snored loudly in the next room, causing Benten to break out into another bout of muffled laughter.

The man on the screen had yellow hair. There were yellow fruits on the counter just out of Juno and Ben’s reach. A painting on the wall over top of the table was streaked with 3D printed yellow stripes. Mom’s gold earrings sat on the table behind him, glinting in different shades of white and grey with the movements on the stream.

“Hey, Benzaiten?”

“Hey, Super Steel?”

“Shut up. Do you think it’s weird that I have colour from you and not mom?”

There must have been something in his voice because the smile on Ben’s face melted slightly in sympathy. His eyes softened and Juno hated it. He didn’t need pity-- especially not from Ben. He felt his own face fall back into a glower.

“Hey, nah it isn’t weird. I mean, I don’t really have much colour from her, and just ‘cause I have colours from Jack doesn’t mean…” He trailed off as Juno glared harder, “It’s not weird. Is what I mean.”

“Yeah, sure, whatever. Lets put on some Turbo or something. Mom will be home soon anyways.”

By the time Sarah Steel entered the house, the two of them were fast asleep in front of the holoscreen which had turned off automatically. They stirred as they were picked up and carried to their room and tucked into bed, but quickly fell back asleep again, burrowed under their covers.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

> content warnings from last chapter apply here!! i forgot that i wasn't postng this chapter till today sorry!!!
> art by the lovely charles tin.pear!! you can find his work on instagram and twitter by searching that handle!

Benzaiten easily surpassed Juno in the colour department when they started school. They knew, of course, that colours come and go as people get older, meet new people, and see the world, but Ben had four new Kindergarten soulmates, double that at the beginning of elementary school, and by the time he finished fifth grade, he must have had a dozen. Juno didn't understand how there was that much rainbow in the world. Meanwhile, Juno's world was still only the yellow of tablet pens on the board, the gold of his teacher's hair, the yellow of a healing bruise on his classmate's nose. That should teach her for trying to tease Ben when Juno wasn't looking.

Lunch got lonely. When they were younger, the siblings would eat together at the back of the room, observing people from afar. Sixth grade, though, had Juno sitting at the back table, alone save for the creep from the other homeroom, watching Ben laugh with his friends. Every once in a while he would purposefully catch Juno's eyes to make a face at him or wave him over. Juno never took him up on the offer.

It wasn't as though Benzaiten never spent time with him anymore even, so he didn't know why it made him feel so bad. They sat together in all of their classes, worked together on every project, partnered up in gym class, and, of course, lived together. Juno had no right to be *jealous* of him just because he couldn't make friends like that. No one was really looking to be friends with local downer Juno Steel anyways.

Rolling his eyes at the weird kid sitting next to him, he angrily threw out his half-full bagged lunch and walked out the school doors. He

was grumbling, moody, and hungry as he walked down the Oldtown streets, kicking a rock along as he went. Ben would be worried when he didn't show up for gym class, but he didn't care. Besides, Benzaiten had other friends to hang out with. Juno would just bring him down. He turned around and punched a tree, only to pull his aching hand tightly back to his chest with tears in his eyes.

From behind him suddenly came the loud slap of running feet and the panting glee of the people the feet belonged to. He whipped around just in time to see two kids around his age running toward him, one with a near manic grin on his face, and the other looking extremely irritated. The grinning one caught Juno's eye and he could see a bag of food from the grocery store nearly splitting open in the boy's arms.

"Aren't you one of those Steel kids?" The boy shouted as they caught up to him. Juno barely had time to nod or bark out a 'who's askin' before the boy chucked a pack of expensive blue frosted cookies at him. A tall man in a blue HCPD uniform, part of the unlucky Oldtown neighbourhood watch, screeched around the corner, blaster ready in his bony hands, breathing hard beneath his bright orange beard and moustache. "You just gonna stand there kid? Let's go!"

The girl punched the boy in the shoulder hard enough to knock him slightly off course as she grabbed Juno by the arm roughly and dragged him running after them. "You're complicit now. Hurry up."

The dirt beneath their pounding feet was orange and dry. Plumes of it came up from the ground to gather in Juno's windpipe while he desperately tried to suck in breath to match the kids' fast pace. A dark blue hovercycle sat leaning against a tree up ahead with only two helmets, but the girl threw Juno on anyway so that he was squashed beneath them. The boy started the engine, cackling as his hair whipped behind him into Juno's face. Partially to get the hair out of his face, and partially to see if they were still being followed, Juno twisted slightly and watched the orange and blue beanpole of a man get smaller and smaller in the distance.

What the fuck.

“What the fuck,” Juno said, quiet more out of confusion that an attempt to censor his words. The girl behind him put her hands on either side of his head and forced him to look forward again, forcing him to shove his face back into the boy’s long, coarse black hair. Orange dirt whipped past them as the boy drove through the streets.

They came to a stop at a building that looked abandoned, though all

the buildings looked abandoned in this part of Oldtown. The other two kids hopped off the hovercycle and walked away toward the building without waiting for Juno.

"Hey, wait up! You think you can kidnap me and then just leave me here?" Juno growled petulantly, mostly to himself as the others hadn't stopped. He kicked the dust off of the ground angrily as he walked past, only succeeding in sending himself into another coughing fit which finally got the other two's attention.

"Oh shoot, sorry, bud." The boy walked back, pushing Juno up from where he was bent over his knees. The boy barely waited for him to catch his breath before shoving him toward the fire escape on the side building ahead of them. "My name's Mick, that's Sasha, and you're blue. So that's cool. Sasha, isn't that cool?"

Sasha hummed as she pulled down the rusty ladder. It didn't look like she cared at all.

"We found lunch *and* another soulmate! I think that's a pretty good record for 'things stolen in one day', huh?"

"I think he's more orange to me." Sasha's voice was matter-of-fact as though she was the only one with the right answer in this scenario. The sky was grey-ish with a blazing orange sun that beat down on them as they sat collapsed and sweaty on the building's roof.

"You're probably right," Mick said without a fight, but with a wink to Juno, "Do you want a cookie or something? Or something else? We have a lot of food here."

"You're sure none of it fell out while you were throwing shit at me in the streets?" Juno bit out with less anger than he hoped for. It still felt like he was a bit fuzzy with shock at suddenly being able to see more

than the yellow of Mick's necklace, or the gold painted onto the toes of Sasha's dirty sneakers.

"Hey, I only threw one thing and it was only so that you'd come with us. " Mick shook his fist at Juno playfully, "You never introduced yourself."

"His name's Juno Steel." Sasha piped up as she wiped her fingers on her dusty blue jeans, "He goes to school with Annie."

"How would you know that?" Juno said, immediately on edge.

"Your mom's a Northstar exec. There aren't too many 'Steels' and word gets around," Sasha shrugged, "Also I know Benzaiten."

"Of course you fucking know Benzaiten. Who *doesn't* ? Gods, can't I have my own soulmates to myself?"

"Oh, we're not soulmates with Benzaiten, he's just a nice guy. Good dancer." Mick said with certainty. He scrunched up his face at the taste of the weird grey pastry in his hand, "I don't know what this is but it tastes disgusting. You have it." Mick shoved it at Sasha who impulsively flipped him off, chucking the pastry off the roof as if it wasn't good food that would go to waste.

"If you won't eat it, there's not a cold chance in hell you're going to get me to, Mercury"

"Fair point"

The trio sat on the roof for hours. The dome's false sun was setting over the horizon, changing the sombre grey sky above to a mix of digital blacks and oranges. Finally, Mick and Sasha began to pack up the leftovers of their feast and Juno was forced to confront the fact that he had no ride home. He was fully ready to suck it up and spent the night wandering the outskirts of Oldtown-- the perfect target for a mugging or something-- when Mick looked back at him curiously.

"Aren't you getting on?"

Very skillfully, Juno hid the surprise from his face. The sunlight glinted off of the hovercycle's silver accents shining golden in Juno's eyes, and all at once, he wanted nothing more than to be home with Ben. Sasha plopped a portion of their leftovers in his hands.

"You have a brother, right? Bring him next time."

The hope that blossomed in his chest was light and airy.

When Juno got home to tell Ben, his mom and Ben were sitting at the table frantically looking over her comms with Ben running his knuckles over his lips-- a nervous tick only Juno noticed. At the sound of the door clicking shut, they both jumped up, whirling around to face Juno. He was sure the lecture would come later, but for now, he was covered in tears, hugs, and Sarah Steel's lipstick as she pressed kisses all over his forehead.

"Juno where *were* you," His mother demanded, squishing his cheeks with her hands, "I was about to call Jack to watch Benten so I could…" She trailed off when she saw the smile on his face. Ben hugged him impossibly tighter before leaning back.

"I saw you leave school and then you left and you weren't in our next

class and you looked upset so I tried to find you but I couldn't find you and I thought you'd--" Benzaiten was rambling, so Juno covered his mouth with one hand. His mom's hair clasps were dark navy blue, almost fading into her dark box braids.

"Benzaiten, your shoes are orange." He said simply. Ben blinked in surprise from behind Juno's hand, before throwing himself back into another tight hug. His mom looked surprised as well as she said:

"What… happened today?" She said, shocked.

"I left school early--"

"Juno." There was a warning note in her voice that made him rush the rest of his explanation.

"I found some people, their names are Sasha and Mick-- Mick has a hovercycle and it's really cool, you'd like it, Ben. I met them and they gave me colours and now I can see orange and blue I think." Juno's voice cut off abruptly as his mom stepped toward him, only to tense up uselessly and she ruffled his hair, "I have snacks?"

"Where did you find money to buy snacks?" Mom asked too casually for that to have been the right thing to say.

"I didn't." He said simply before he remembered who he was talking to, "Mick and Sasha bought them. They gave me what was left. I'm sorry I wasn't home, I lost track of time. Is there anything around the house that I can do?" When Sarah didn't respond, he ducked his head, "I love you two?"

“...I love you too, my little monsters. But don’t do that to me again. We were worried sick.” She said as if nothing was wrong after all, and Juno felt the tension drain from him, melting back into Benten’s grip around his waist. He was okay. Ben leaned back and pulled Juno by the hand down the hall to their bedroom.

“I’m gonna tell Juno what he missed in class today.”

With the door shut behind them, Juno couldn’t help the smile that appeared on his face. Mom wasn’t mad, Benzaiten was okay, and he had new friends. Staying true to his promise, Ben pulled out his orange-- orange!-- dou-tang from his backpack, flattening it on the floor between them.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

> this chapter starts out the heavier side of juno's life and has ben's death so big warning for sarah steel! content warnings later on for cheating and implied/referenced drug and alcohol use/abuse
> art once again by charles tin.pear!

A gunshot rang out over the comms, and Juno had never been more terrified in his life. Surely, if something like that had happened, he would know. The contact name in his comms was still yellow, though, and there were golden earrings hanging from Rita's ears as she sat at her desk chewing hot pink bubblegum 10 feet away from him. His vision tunnelled on Rita's earrings as the dial tone buzzed in his ear. There was no way. There was no way. This couldn't have happened. The buzzing from the comms permeated his skull giving him an instant headache as the sound bounced around his vibrating bones. It felt as though he was wearing a compression vest that was slowly getting tighter and tighter, but Juno hadn't worn anything on his chest since he started having trouble with his asthma. He might have dropped his comms, or at least he probably did because his hand was no longer holding it.

Rita's chair scraped back violently from her desk with the sound of another gunshot, and he flinched back violently, cracking his head on the wall he had been leaning against with the sound of another gunshot. Suddenly, Rita's head popped into his field of vision, her curly mass of box-dyed pink hair giving off the distinct scent of cherries. A pair of hands grabbed gently at his arms, and he tried to get away from them. He trained his eyes on her mouth with her hot pink glossy lipstick so that he wouldn't be able to see any yellow fading. Her lips were moving. He tried to focus on what she was saying over the buzz of weapons firing off inside his head.

"--Okay. No touching is okay. Can you hear me now, Mistah Steel? If not that's okay too and all I just need to know if you can just in case because if you can I can help you out. If not I can talk. Is it okay if I talk?"

Juno blinked a few times, unsure as to why his eyes were blurry. He nodded.

"Wait I asked two questions. My mistake, Mistah Steel, was that a yes

to the hearing me? Well, I guess if you nodded that definitely means you're hearing me. Do you want me to help calm you down?" He nodded again, "Okay so we're gonna do some breathing, okay? Can you sit down with me here?"

Her voice was gentle in a way Juno had never heard before. He nodded once again, feeling his head swim with the movement, and he slid to the ground with a thump. He couldn't think or focus or anything. He wasn't listening to Rita again. She picked up his hand and brought it to her chest.

"Are you back, Mistah Steel? Oh good. Can you breathe with me? Okay, that's good!" It took far too long for Juno to come back to himself to explain the phone call brusquely to Rita as he jumped off of the ground to grab his coat. At the door, however, he hesitated.

"Rita, I--"

"If you want, I could go with you?" Her voice sounded as sad as her face looked. She cleared her throat and pushed herself to standing. "You're in no space to be able to drive right now. Grab my coat, Mistah Steel, and remember that no matter what happens, I'm right outside." The drive to his mother's house in Oldtown took barely any time, and Juno wasn't sure whether that was because he still wasn't fully present, or if Rita had been speeding. He wouldn't be surprised if it was a combination of the two. He didn't need to stop to unlock, or even open, the door, as it was slightly ajar. The fact only made his hands shake harder.

Sarah Steel was sitting in the kitchen down the hall drinking a glass of amber coloured alcohol. She looked up in bland shock when she saw him standing in the doorway, fists clenched at his sides, breathing heavily as if he ran here.

"You took your sweet time getting here. What's the matter? Had something better to do?" The blasé tone of her voice and the implication that he didn't care about Benten made him feel nauseous. His voice seemed to bubble out of him of its own accord.

"Where is he?" The panic he felt was evident in his voice. He had lost feeling in his knees, and he had to stop himself from leaning over to steady himself on the door frame. Showing weakness was a bad sign in this house.

"It's been months since you've seen old Ma, and I don't even get a hello?" She looked at him with a mechanical tilt to her head and a

dramatic pout of her lip. There were deep shadows under her eyes, accentuated by the shining golden eyeshadow she was wearing. She must have just gotten back home. His head felt like it was floating a few inches in front of him.

“Tell me where--”

“So you can do what, exactly?” She set her glass down hard enough that Juno thought it would have been less stress on the glass if she’d thrown it at the wall. “Think for a second. You never. Think. Or if you can’t manage that, why don’t you just sit down and shut up. You talk too much. It’s my turn, little monster.”

Juno watched her stand up, fury in her expression. Why was she mad. She shouldn’t be allowed to be the one mad right now. She walked towards him slowly with hunched shoulders. The sudden feeling of being prey to a predator was enough to make Juno take a handful of cautious steps away, only just biting down on a whimper.

“You think you’ve got it all figured out now, don’t you?” She continued, “Fancy badge, fancy gun – like a uniform’s gonna cage what’s in you.” She poked one sharp manicured nail toward him as he stumbled back, his back pressed into the door behind him which lead to her office. He felt faint. Her office. Weakly, he zoned out her words and tapped on the door.

“Ben? Benten, are you in there? Ben!” She was wrong. She hadn’t-- She couldn’t have hurt him. He should have… He held his shaking hand out to her and glared as best he could, “Give me the key.”

“Why? You know what’s in there.” Her expression had lost the fury that distorted it before, leaving it eerily blank.

It felt like all he could say was “Why.” His hands continued their frantic tapping on the door behind him, as her voice remained toneless and loud in his ears. Words caught in his head, filtering through the fog. It was supposed to be him. It was his fault. She thought he was him. The pills were in her bag all along. There was no point. There was no--

“Benten!” He slammed his hand into the door, “Benten, open this door!”

The keys. The keys landed at his feet. His shaking hands fumbled them three times before he could hold them steady enough to unlock the door. Sarah walked calmly back to the kitchen table to pick up her

glass. The puddle underneath his brother's body was grey, but the light that flickered off the stain on his shirt was pink. He had dyed his hair blue recently. Juno notes belatedly that he should be able to see the colour of Ben's earring, but the colour is flickering in between shades of gold and grey and he can't tell if it's his imagination or not.

A small hand manicured hand landed on his back. He was crying. Police sirens rang loudly as though Juno was hearing them from the other end of a busy street. Rita's sharp, hot pink nails trace patterns down his back, easing him up so that the body-- his brother-- could be dealt with. He took a deep breath. He took a deep breath. He took a deep breath.

Rita took him back to her house. Her house is full of comfortable, plush furniture with handmade blankets draped over so many surfaces that Juno lost track when he'd originally tried to count them.

"Oh, those? Frannie made them. She tried to teach me how to crochet once, said it was easier than knitting or something, but I could never get the hang of it. She once taught me how to knit a scarf, but once purling was involved I had to hand the project back to her. Had to tell her 'No siree, y'can't teach this old dog new tricks, but you can--'"

Juno felt comfortable around Rita. She didn't mind when he zoned out her speech. She pushed him toward the cushy dull blue couch and set about making them both tea. When she was done, she sat down beside him, pressing a pastel pink mug into his hands.

"Here you go, sir."

"You don't have to call me sir, Rita."

"Nah, it's fine, Mistah Steel. Is touch okay right now? I just wanted to ask because sometimes I know when Frannie gets to feelin' out of sorts, she tends to like her space, but I usually like hugs when I'm upset--"

"A hug would be nice." He said, swallowing thickly.

"Can do!" She smiled at him, not pitying but caring. She curled around him, nearly ending up in his lap when he pulled her closer to bury his face in her shoulder, "Are you okay if I turn on a stream? It might be a good distraction." He nodded. "Alright. This one is about the leader of this alien cult who meets a witch and together they try to

do a heist on a church and it's all very dramatic and world end-y. How does that sound? I've got a ton of streams downloaded for us to choose from so if you aren't feelin' up to this one, in particular, I've got plenty-a other ones too."

"This one's okay"

The gold accents in Rita's pink-framed glasses looked slightly dull as though someone had turned the saturation down very slightly on that one specific part of his surroundings. However, if he looked around, he could see that all of the yellow in Rita's living room was as vibrant as before. Maybe it was a proximity thing. He stared intently at the yellow strip of yarn on an afghan across the room and watched until it flickered slightly in colour. It was terrifying. He didn't want to think about it. He closed his eyes against the spectacular splashes of bright colour and greyscale surrounding the two of them.

Rita's colour matched her, and he didn't think that just because it was also her favourite colour (She'd gotten pink from Frannie). Rita's dark hair was faded at the end with pastel pink that matched the colour of her dish set. Her glasses were the colour of the inside of strawberries--not the mushy grey of the outside. She was bright and vibrant with a loud personality. Juno liked that about her. He would never say that of course, but it was nice to have someone like her around to help him up when he'd gotten low.

He used to have more than just Rita for that position, but it seemed like he was going to have to get used to things changing, and he was going to have to get used to that fast.

Later, Juno realized that what he actually needed to get used to was the dull sheen that yellow had taken up. When he finally got up the nerve to return to his apartment, Juno shoved everything he could find that had any shade of yellow in it into the back of his closet, vowing to forget about it as soon as possible. He couldn't forget Benzaiten, he didn't frankly think it would be possible, but he could really do without the constant reminder that he was gone.

The next few weeks were rough, and Rita couldn't help him through all of it, which was fair. She was his secretary, not his shrink and dragging someone like her down into his bullshit with him was a mistake he was not willing to make. It was hard enough for her to watch him like this, so distancing himself was honestly the best

option. He tried spending some time with Sasha and Mick, but things had never bee the same since Annie. Sasha screened his calls and Mick was trying to hard to be cheerful.

He started spending more time with the Kanagawa twins during nights and throwing himself into his mountainous piles of paperwork during the day. He was coping. It was easy. When he woke up feeling particularly bad about himself sitting on a ratty couch in a rental apartment that wasn't his, he would just buy the biggest coffee he could find on the way to work. He could pretend that nothing was wrong because nothing was wrong. He was fine.

He met Diamond at a party.

Both of them were a bit drunk but far more sober than anyone else in the house and as such, they got to talking. Sitting on either side of a lumpy couch in some school teacher's apartment, they bonded, laughed, drank, and, eventually, exchanged comms frequencies. She had short incredibly mussed grey hair that was plastered to her forehead with the heat from the room, and a smile that made her whole face scrunch up.

"What's your name by the way?" She asked through a laugh. He didn't remember actually saying anything particularly funny, but then again maybe he'd just had a bit more to drink than he originally thought. At some point over the last few hours, they had moved closer and closer together under the guise of not being able to hear each other over the pounding music.

"Ah, Juno. What's yours?"

"Diamond! Hey, it's pretty loud in here. Do you want to head out?" She smiled that same big smile at him and raised her eyebrows in a way that made him down the rest of his honestly horribly mixed drink to follow her out into the hot night air. The night wasn't going at all how he had expected it to go, and that fact didn't change in the slightest when Diamond hooked her hand around Juno's arm and led him through the streets to Halcyon park.

"This isn't where I expected you to take me," Juno said plainly, trying to hide a small smile.

"Halcyon is pretty at night with all the neon bouncing off it. It was just really loud in there. Sorry if you expected me to take you home," She pulled him down to whisper, "We can definitely still end the night there if you're up to it later."

“I’m sure I can find it in myself to be in the mood.”

“I look forward to it.” She leaned up on her toes, mouth millimetres away from his, before smiling and spinning out of his arms into the night air. Overhead, the chirp of the dome sang quietly under the buzz of the neon street lamps that lined the busy streets on either side of the abnormally large patch of grass that Hyperion called a park.

Maybe his hopes were up (just a bit) but Juno couldn’t help but spend the next few days, weeks even, looking out for new colours. At one point he thought he’d found a new colour, but it turned out to only be a shade of blue he hadn’t seen as frequently. Juno thought it was good to have Diamond around. Sure, he continued spending his nights out and he woke up wearing the clothes from the day before more often than he woke up in his own bed, but Diamond was good about getting him out of the house. He’d been to more restaurants in Hyperion than he thought he’d ever been to in his life.

For the first time since really getting to know Rita, Juno felt actually quite happy. Rita kept trying to get him to come to her house for movie nights, but he felt almost dopey with the need to be with Diamond. She brought Juno to as many house parties as she took him to fancy art galas just so they could make fun of the art while the people with actual money glowered at them. She was a proper gentleman. Juno tried not to let it get to him that the paintings in the galas remained the same colours he had before with a healthy mix of grey and dull yellow.

“Hey,” She said one night when Juno was lying on her chest half dozing, “I think I love you.” He felt himself tense against her and knew she could feel it as well because she immediately lifted her head to look at him curiously. He really hadn’t wanted to have this conversation.

“You can’t.” He said, eyes regretfully glued to her dark black eyes. She lowered her eyebrows, visibly taken aback.

“Excuse me?”

“You can’t love me.”

“Yeah, Juno, I heard you the first time.” She looked at him expectantly, “It’s not every day you get a colour from someone, and I don’t think I’m willing to give up purple this easily, personally.” He felt a chill seep deep into his bones.

“What?”

“...What?”

“I gave you... colours.” He said slowly.

“Um...yes. Is that not--” She stopped and realization dawned on her face, “Oh.”

“Are you sure you didn’t get purple from...someone else?”

“Who else would I have gotten it from, Juno?” She demanded, shoving him roughly off of her so that she could stand up from the bed to pace. “All this time and you didn’t think to, I don’t know, tell me?”

“You didn’t tell me either! I thought we were on the same page here!”

“Well, obviously not.” She snapped. He flinched back into the pillows at her tone, glad that she was looking away.

“I love you?” He tried, cringing internally at how much he sounded like he was back in his childhood home trying to find out if his mother was mad. At Diamond’s silence, he could tell something was wrong-- of course, he knew something was wrong, but the confirmation was… something

Juno could tell from that moment that things were going to have to change no matter how much he hoped they wouldn’t. Diamond still took him out on nice walks and for dinners, but she didn’t laugh as much. Juno suddenly started being the one taking her out on dates instead of the other way around. He honestly couldn’t help it. Sure, they didn’t share colours mutually, but Juno loved her still. Part of him doubted the whole system. Who was there to decide who he could or couldn’t have in his life? What fucked up universe did he live in that he couldn’t choose his own life for himself?

And then a flickering neon light would catch his attention. And then a flash of jewelry would force his attention. And then he’d find a stray cat on the streets with vibrantly dyed fur. And then he’d remember Ben and he would try to redirect his thoughts.

It was a long time before Juno found himself dragging Rita out of their office to the shops with a heat in his face that he couldn’t seem to shake, and his shoulders hunched around his ears. Diamond and him had been together for years. Things hadn’t ever really been the same as they had before they’d… talked, but they’d gotten better. In

that time, Juno had, somewhat, cleaned up his act, gotten fired from his job, and undergone a career change of sorts. Despite her generally consistent opinion of Diamond, Rita was ecstatic.

“You really trust me to help you with this, boss?” She said, too loud for Juno’s tastes. He pressed his hands into her shoulders and looked around to see if anyone heard her as if anyone could read his thoughts.

“Yes, Rita, but I need you to be quiet. I want it to be a surprise, and I don’t know much about… this.” He admitted, moving one hand from Rita’s shoulder to rub his hot face.

“Y’know I didn’t really know about you two. I mean, call me a romantic or something, but I can’t help but love true romance-- Not to say anything about Diamond and all. I know you love her even though she didn’t give you any colours, boss, I’m just saying--”

“No, no. See this is an example of what I want you not to be talking about right now. At all really. I would really prefer it actually if you didn’t bring this up when we’re trying to shop for rings.” Juno widened his eyes at her in warning until she gulped and mimed sealing her lips.

“Alright, alright! Sheesh…” She mumbled, “A lady just tries to express her opinion these days and--”

“‘A lady’ doesn’t wanna hear it.” He grumbled, “Just show me where I buy the stupid ring already.” Rita raised her eyebrows. “...Please.”

“Right this way, boss!”

One of Rita’s younger sisters-- Juno didn’t know which one. She just had so many he lost track-- had given Rita purple so she helped him pick out a ring that Juno thought Diamond would love. It looked simple enough but had a big gem in the centre. He had saved all of the creds from his last assignment. Rita had even given Juno her mother’s old wedding dress. It may have been a bit forward on her part, but Juno wasn’t too fussed. He didn’t necessarily want to deal with wedding dress shopping especially after he was spending his entire paycheck on a ring alone. To be fair, Diamond and Juno had talked about their future together often, so it didn’t seem too out of line for him to want to be ready. The dress was stashed in a box in the very corner of his closet so that she wouldn’t find it.

There wouldn’t be much time to go wedding dress shopping anyway

with the amount of business he and Rita were getting. Juno had received an alarming amount of publicity for his capture of Comet Hart-- a renowned cred thief who Juno had just managed to catch based on information he'd had Rita sneak from the HCPD. Rita and he were currently in the middle of a case, an easy one really. They'd been hired to find out if their client's husband was cheating on her. Usually, cheating cases were decidedly easy, but this husband was excelling in the secret department if she actually was keeping a secret at all that was. But who was Juno to complain? He was getting paid hourly, and if he was taking some rich sucker's creds to go ring shopping, he wasn't going to complain much.

One of the problems with being a P.I. in a place like Hyperion City was that Juno knew the people by name who were willing to do bad and he knew what they'd do to get what they wanted. Sure, he had trust issues with a healthy side helping of paranoia, but in his line of work that was more of a blessing than a curse in a lot of ways. Sometimes a lady needed to be a little 'shoot first, ask questions later' if he was planning to live to see his next paycheck.

Suffice it to say, Juno kept the ring and its little box tucked away on his person at all times. If it was with him, he knew where it was, and if he knew where it was, he could keep it from getting stolen. Sure, he obsessively checked the tiny pocket on the inside of his jacket maybe a bit too much, but the thing cost a lot of money. It was normal to be nervous at the thought of losing it.

Juno's hand instinctively ran over the discrete bump in the fabric as he rolled quietly through the window and into the office. The thump of his feet on the carpet was masked, to him, by the screech of Rita into his earpiece.

"Remember, Mistah Steel, nine times outta ten the evidence is in the cheater's desk."

"Rita, I know for a fact you got that from that thing you were watching in the office today," he mumbled, but still ambled his way over to the big metal desk in the middle of the office, careful to watch his steps for creaky floorboards-- one of the few habits he was glad he retained from childhood. The desk was far too big for a regular person to have, which was suspicious enough. "Who needs this many desk drawers anyways? There's gotta be nearly 10 here.

“Hm, so you’re checkin’ the desk first,” Rita said innocently over the comms. “Funny how that works, huh, Boss?”

“Rita, I swear--”

“I’m just making an observation, isn’t that good detective work of me?”

“Oh, you…” He trailed off, grumbling but staying quiet as they were definitely not supposed to be in their client’s house at all. As quickly as possible, he jimmied open the first few drawers. There was a slight catch as he pulled them open as if they were caught on something. (He made a mental note to check them again after he’d gone through the other drawers). The top middle drawer was mostly normal. It had some ecards and a few tablet pens probably for easy access as well as a tube of the husband’s favourite lipstick. It was orange in colour (Juno made a note of that too-- what? He was a lady of style! Sue him!).

Halfway through the upper left two drawers, Rita began quickly typing away on the computer in front of her. The very computer that she was using to monitor the house’s security system and alarmed cameras. Now, Juno knew she was easily distractible at the best of times, but as he was elbows deep in a drawer filled with collectable Uranus coins, he knew that she wasn’t just busying herself with another regular old distraction. The light from the window behind him glinted off a golden coin, making him wince. Something was wrong.

“Hey, Rita, just wondering, but is there a reason you’re typing to all hell right now?” He grunted, rolling the coin in his hand.

“Uh,” The tone of her voice alone was enough to raise his hackles, “Now don’t be getting all panicky and stuff, but I did just have to reactivate all of the alarms and security systems and the like that I disabled for you to get in here.”

He pulled his hand from the coin drawer, reasonably sure that he hadn’t missed anything, or at least sure that he wasn’t willing to get that in-depth with his search. “And can I ask why you’re doing that?”

“So…” She said, and Juno could immediately picture the face she was making. All pursed lips and raised eyebrows as though trying to sugar coat something, “There may or may not be someone approaching the house right now, boss, and I’m just worried that they’d think something had gone a bit haywire if they, uh, if they got here and

their whole security system was turned off."

"Can you just tell me who it is, Rita? Like I'm paying you to?"

"Well, boss, y'see that's the problem with sending all the cameras onto a lockdown reset cycle, because those, as I told you twenty minutes ago when I did it, can't be changed or touched or anything once I've set them to start."

"Pretend you're talking to me and try that again."

"I can't use the cameras till they're done updatin'."

"...Great." Juno fell back onto his heels and stared up at the ceiling. Rita sucked in an apologetic breath.

"Yeah… I'd really suggest gettin' outta there, Mistah Steel."

"And how would someone hypothetically go about doing that without being spotted now that someone is here and the security system we spent three weeks trying to figure out how to shut off has been reactivated?" Her silence was telling enough. "If you don't mind now, I'm going to go back looking through this desk. Thanks."

His senses on high alert, he continued going through the drawers, quicker now than he was moments before. Eventually, after finding the remaining drawers were only filled with boring filing cabinets chock full of useless files, he shimmied his plasma cutter underneath the top few drawers that had originally been stuck. In his ear, Rita nervously listened to his progress through the crunch of her salmon bites.

A set of high-heeled footsteps clicked around on the floor below accompanied by the slap of sneakers on the carpeted floor. His eyes narrowed. Priam didn't wear sneakers, and while the heels sounded familiar as her husband's, he couldn't even imagine Priam wearing anything but Oxford's. The couple was classy. Juno hadn't seen a single t-shirt let alone a pair of sneakers in the closet he looked through on Priam's initial tour of the house.

The drawer gave way just as the click of heels began ascending the long spiral staircase leading to the floor Juno was on. Juno breathed sharply in as he pushed the drawer up just enough to stick his hand underneath it. It was hard to feel around for anything without being able to see what he was reaching for, but soon enough, his fingers landed on the corner of a letter-- written on real paper too. These

people had money; they would never have the need for something as old fashioned as paper. Juno shoved it as carefully as he could into the pocket of his jacket and began the tedious process of covering his tracks all while his ears stayed acutely aware of the ever closer footsteps.

Two voices drifted in his general direction, close enough that as he shut the last of the drawers and ignored Rita while his brain immediately searched the room for places to hide. Over the pounding of blood in his ears and the frantic sound of Rita's voice, he couldn't focus hard enough on the voices of those quickly coming toward him. As sneakily as he could, Juno lunged across the room into the shadows where a tall dresser was propped far enough from the wall to allow Juno to fit behind it. The sound of his breath, still too loud in his ears, was muffled slightly by his hand which he had clapped over his mouth. It made breathing hard, but the alternative was alerting the people in the house to his presence by standing in the shadows, panting.

Slowly, Juno twisted so that he could just barely peek around the dresser. All he could see in the room was the door and the desk, but that was enough for him. He guessed that he may as well try to close this case while he was here if he wasn't going to be able to get out any time soon. To focus better, Juno muted the comms in his ear just as the two people entered the room.

Juno felt light-headed. First entering the room was Pearl Lane, husband of Priam Lane. He looked flustered with his long straight hair mussed at the back. Juno was correct in his assumption that the heel-clad footsteps belonged to the man in question. What he wasn't expecting were the electric pink sneakers that followed him in. His eyes slowly travelled up the owner of those familiar shoes, coming to a stop at Diamond's mussed hair. His breath hitched quietly behind his hand, the sound thankfully covered up by the click of the gentle thump of Lane sitting down on the edge of his desk, looking at Diamond with eyes full of something like wonder.

Willing them to stop, Juno watched as Diamond wandered over to his client's husband almost casually, as though they knew they had all the time in the world. The little velvet box in Juno's pocket felt like it suddenly weighed fifty pounds as he watched Lane's wiry arms circle around Diamond's waist. Juno finally looked away when Diamond leaned in. He unmuted Rita just to give him a distraction from the sounds the two were making not seven feet away from him.

He was numbly considering ruining his life by slamming his head against this ugly orange wallpaper just to get them to stop when the sound of a doorbell suddenly rang out through the house. Juno heard Diamond huff exaggeratedly as Lane pushed her off of him.

“You need to leave.” He said, a hushed and secretive note in his voice. “I don’t know who that is but no one can know you’re here. You are aware of the back way right?”

“Yeah, yeah. Through the back playroom, I know.” Juno held his breath and knew she was rolling her eyes at having to sneak around. He knew that tone of voice. He’d heard that tone of voice directed at him many a time. It was everything he could do to not jump out from his hiding spot and… do what exactly? He had no idea what he would even do in this situation. The comms was silent showing that Rita had muted herself. Juno stayed in his hiding spot long after he’d heard the two of them leave the room. He kept himself hidden until he heard Lane answer the door with a professional greeting. He pursed his lips at the back fo the dresser as he heard a familiar voice.

“Hey, Mistah! Have you by chance seen my cat? She got out of my door when I was checking my mail and ran this way. She’s a pretty little thing with black fur and these gorgeous blue compound eyes? Her name is…” Rita’s voice was loud through the floors. Juno knew an out when he saw one.

Rita’s car was a little blue thing with silver accents and broken locks, so he let himself in while she was talking to Lane. Juno was hunched down in the passenger seat so that passerby couldn’t see him when Rita got back to the car. She was sweating nervously and looking straight ahead with wide eyes.

“So. That was--”

“Take me to Priam Lane’s office, Rita.”

“Really? Already? You’re sure you don’t want to--”

“You heard me. You heard them. I have the evidence I need.” He pulled out the envelope he’d taken from Lane’s desk. It was already open, and the writing inside was distinctively small and bold. Even if he hadn’t been able to personally identify the printing, the name at the bottom was a dead give away. Diamond’s had signed her name in a flourish next to a lipstick kiss that seemed to mock him from the page. She’d been wearing golden lipstick when she kissed the letter. Juno felt like he was going to be sick. “We’re going to Priam Lane,

we're going to explain what we saw, and then I'm going to find myself a tall glass of alcohol to get lost in. I just want this to be done."

The thought of returning to the store where he'd purchased the ring and begging for a refund was too much for him. Instead, after a healthy amount of nights spent picking fights in seedy Oldtown bars, Juno went on a walk. The cemetery was conspicuously grey. He was reasonably sure that headstones were meant to be that colour, but the wisps of grey grass peaking up in patches from the grey dirt made him angry.

The dirt around Benten's grave was packed from the number of visits it got, and flat enough that Juno could balance his bottle of whiskey on the ground in front of him while he dug through his coat pockets. The liquid was grey, but when the sun shone through it, it had flickers of gold and orange. He sighed and put his head in his hands.

"Ben, you were always right, but you were definitely right about my bad taste in partners. The person I told you about last time I was here? Diamond? Yeah, turns out that was nothing. I guess 'they' weren't kidding about this whole colours… thing." He spat the word like it was poisonous as he dug his short nails into his cheekbones. "Turns out I wasn't good enough for her or something. Anyways, I thought I'd leave this here for you. I guess. I don't fucking know. This is stupid. You're dead and I'm talking to a grave, gods I'm pathetic."

Even still, he continued to sit there watching the artificial lights of the dome above dim from dirty blue to dusty orange, leaning his back against the rock. Eventually, after hours sitting in silence, he dug slightly into the dirt with his fingers. The hole he dug was small and shallow, but deep enough. He placed the ring inside and left the bottle of alcohol over top of it. His head was cloudy. Without thinking, he let his legs walk him all the way to Rita's.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

enter: a certain "bright-eyed" thief.

When Juno met Rex Glass, his world seemed brighter. They escaped the jaws of death-- literally and figuratively-- together. They solved a mystery together. They left the Kanagawa's together.

They kissed.

He left.

Juno couldn't help but wish he'd stolen colours from him as he stared down at the musty yellow note in his arms written in messy cursive. The pen ink was blue. His apartment smelled like him. Everything was just fine.

Chapter 5

He couldn't help but think of Diamond when he met Private Investigator Alessandra Strong. The two weren't similar in the least, honestly. Their meeting was purely situational.

Juno didn't realize anything was different until he'd nabbed her I.D. off her, and saw that the blocking around the image of her serious face was… purple. He thought? He thought that was what purple was.

"...Alessandra Strong… Private eye?" There was no way for him to hide how weirded out he was in the way he spoke. Here he was supposed to be on an easy in-and-out case and who does he bump into but… purple. He didn't get the same feeling he got with the other people though. Benzaiten was different-- obviously-- But all the other people he'd gotten colour from, he immediately felt like he clicked with. Maybe he'd screwed up his brain after Ben's death or after Diamond's--

"Nice to meet you." She said, and Juno settled his expression. He didn't have time for this. He had a job to do.

"So much for honour among thieves."

Christopher Morales, the man who w *asn't,* ' lived' in a very tasteful neighbourhood. The Old Industrial District of Hyperion City was about as interesting as it sounded. The only buildings in the area were massive and crumbling from weather damage. The dome was thinner around those parts of the city, which was evident in the divots littering the metal and rock of the surrounding structures. Sandstorms on Mars were intense with the wind kicking up rocks and sharp sand, and these buildings were a good enough example of why people took

shelter during them.

If that wasn't enough, Alessandra had stuck the two of them on a stakeout. He really couldn't've been more bored. His eyes glazed over the orange of the horizon obscured slightly by the strange grey-ish flicker of the edge of the dome. Wind licked up small tornados of orange sand. An empty food container that had yet to fully compost flew past the mouth of the alleyway and pasted itself to the wall. It twitched every once in a while with the surrounding wind. He sighed. He switched positions to try to get more comfortable. It was so boring.

"Steel, if you don't stop fidgeting right now, I'm going to *make* you."

"We've been sitting here for two hours. Can we not just kick down the door and get him ourselves?"

"Were you not a cop? Are you telling me you've never done a stakeout before?"

"Of course I've done stakeouts. I'm just saying, it would be a lot more efficient if we just skipped to the next step. There are a lot of things that are more fun than sitting on the ground in an alleyway. Besides, the lights have been off in there for the whole time we've been sitting here. Have you seen any movement in there, because I haven't."

"You have to be the least patient person I've ever had that pleasure of meeting."

"I'm choosing to take that as a compliment."

"It wasn't intended as one."

“And yet, here I am taking it as one.”

Alessandra sighed and rolled her eyes at him, before fixing them forward again on Morales’ house. “I once spent a whole three days during the war stuck in a foxhole before anyone found me.”

“That’s rough, but you also *chose* this situation for us, so I’m feeling pretty okay about being impatient.”

“Gods, okay,” she dragged her hands down her face, “Let’s swap stories. Will that keep you busy enough? Worst case stories?”

Alessandra had a nice laugh, and she was a good storyteller on top of that. They barely remembered to reign in their laughter, but Juno couldn’t help it. It’d been a while since he’d had a good laugh. It didn’t last long when Alessandra turned to him for his own worst case. He stared at the ground.

“Uh. A friend of mine.”

“That doesn’t sound too bad. What happened?”

“She hired me to see if her husband was cheating on her.”

“...And?” Alessandra raised an eyebrow, clearly waiting for some sort of punchline.

“I proved her right.” He swallowed, desperate to change the subject. “Hey what was it that Strauss had in that folder anyway? What does this thing even do?” He pulled the weird little rock out of his trench coat pocket to examine it closer.

Sufficiently distracted, or at least pretending to be, Alessandra pulled out the folder and began leafing through it. “Honestly, a lot of it seems like gibberish to me, but there is a lot of mention of… reading minds? Or something like it at least. Or maybe something like cold medicine.”

“Doesn’t seem as though cold medicine is meant to make you be able to read thoughts. That seems like a pretty big design flaw.”

“Oh?”

“What? You think it’d be a good idea to have people hopped up on cold medicine and able to read other people’s minds?”

“What, you don’t think people could benefit from a little something helping them communicate? I just think that humanity could do a lot better than having to be direct all of the time.”

“You and I know a very different humanity, Strong.” He kicked the ground in front of him again, the puff of dust from his boot making no difference in the whirling wind around them. She scoffed and turned away again.

“You’re as predictable as you seem, Steel. Funny how that works. I can’t believe I’ve lived through the wars I have, and I still have less trust issues than you.” She said under her breath. He grated his teeth harshly.

“You know what? You’re right. Humanity could use some more direct action. I’m going.” He stood up, not bothering to dust the orange sand off of his jacket.

“Steel? *Steel!?”* Strong whispered loudly after him, “Oh my gods, you’re a complete idiot, aren’t you.”

Juno trudged moodily toward the building, not totally forgoing stealth, but he hadn’t seen anything besides the wind so much as move a centimetre in the past two and a half hours, so he didn’t see too much of a point in trying all that hard. Behind him, Alessandra swore as loudly as she darted out to follow after him, hands clasped tightly around her blaster. They’d already had two deaths from this case, and Juno was getting antsy.

It was the strangest thing. As soon as Juno’s hand touched the shining purple sensor on the door, a blinding, rich grey light burst from all the windows in the house. Alessandra gave up all pretenses and ran up to stand beside him as he frantically shoved open the door. The light was piercing, but didn’t seem to have a specific location it was coming from. Alessandra looked at the immediate fork in the hallways and scowled.

“What god damn horror movie was this pulled from? Pulsing red light and everything.”

“Ah, red?”

“Don’t have that one? Yeah, the light is red and we need to *move--”*

Her voice seemed to become muddy in his ears. That smell. He

remembered that smell from the damn slip of paper he'd nearly fallen out of a window to catch. Juno's knew which hall he needed to head down.

"I'll go this way, and we can meet up in twenty."

"Did you hear a fucking thing I just said about not splitting up?!"

"Twenty-five minutes then."

"Juno Steel, I am not letting you march yourself down that hallway alone in this fucking building. Not a chance."

"Alessandra, please. We have a job to do and we are *running out of time* to do it. There is not enough time to stick together and check both of these hallways. Christopher Morales *has* to be here."

"We do *not* have time to be having this argument. Make it back in twenty or I'm going to personally hunt you down with intent to kill."

"Thanks for the trust, Strong." He said shooting a glassy grin over his shoulder as he hastily moved down the hall. The smell was faint but still strong enough to imply that… He had just been in the very place Juno was standing. The lights blaring around the complex were blindingly bright. *He* could very well still be in the building.

The halls were twisting like a maze, and the grey flashing light was powerful but didn't help in the least to light up the building. He couldn't tell if twenty minutes had passed yet or not, but he sprinted forward still. Eventually, after basically throwing himself down a flight of slippery metal stairs, he encountered a closed dark room.

Somehow, the smell was gone without him realizing it. The light that now seemed as though it was coming from behind him glowed brighter yet. He heard footsteps coming far behind him, and as he began to slouch around the room to the door on the other side, the doorknob twisted.

Juno froze.

His eyes darted around the room, taking in the shadows in the corners and the absolute lack of furniture. Shouts started up behind him. Voices filtered through from the door across the room. filtered through. They knew he was here, and he didn't have long until they got past the lock on the door. They knew he was here, and worse, they knew he had the pill. They had to, otherwise, why would they be coming after him. Shit.

The sound of the doorknob being wrenched in combination with the piercing light behind him made him think fast. Now Juno had never claimed that his knee-jerk reactionary decisions were always the best, but to be fair, the pill didn't break when he'd tried stomping on it earlier. He took a deep breath.

"Bottoms up." He said to himself, sarcastic yet again as he pulled his flask out from one of the many pockets in his coat. The pill was a tough swallow being as big as it was, and the whiskey he was washing it down with had definitely been in this flask for maybe a bit too long, but neither of those things was what he was worried about. As soon as the pill was swallowed, Juno felt a dull pounding start like a drum in both of his temples, steadily getting louder as though his head was about to burst like a balloon. "Oh, this is *not* going to feel good."

All at once, a dizzying purple whirlpool took over Juno's vision and Juno couldn't find it in him to be grateful for the new colour. The pain in his eye was piercing like an icepick to the temples. He couldn't tell if his eyes were open or closed or if he was even conscious for that matter. The pulsing purple haze in his vision was accompanied by a

scream of voices inside of him. He couldn't tell if it was him who was doing the screaming, but he really wanted to be with how much pain he was in. He had vague memories of being hungover in high school with Mick holding back his braids while Sasha lectured him. This thought, however, was gone as quickly as it came to him, replaced easily by a horrifying record scratch of incomprehensible speech.

A single croaking voice solidified in Juno's brain, calling him by name as he tried to focus on the feeling of his limbs twitching where he was collapsed on the floor.

"Hello, Juno Steel." He tried to blink but found his eyes were, in fact, wide open and stuck that way. "You took my pill, didn't you." His wrist hit the concrete ground underneath him. "What made you do it? Duty? Curiosity? Did you take it just to spite me? But how could you? I suppose you don't even know who I am." The purple haze in his vision was blinding. The voice in his head was hard to focus on, but he was pretty sure it wasn't his. "And here's something that's going to drive you wild, Juno Steel: You never will know who I am…"

The voice continued, creaking in time with the hubbub of shifting thoughts knifing through his brain. As it said goodbye, Juno convulsed. A sharp pain in the back of his head signified that he'd slammed it on the concrete underneath him. His throat felt raw, the pain tripled and he--

--Woke up in a hospital room.

The steady beep of machinery woke him, gasping for breath and feeling as though he'd just woken up from a distinctly horrible nightmare unlike any he'd had before. However, the fact that he wasn't facedown on his desk combined with the pinch of needles and tubes in his arms told a different story. Through his blurry eyes, Juno could see Rita sleeping curled up in the off-yellow hospital chair. With every puff of breath, she blew a chunk of hair away from her face. Her glasses were pushed up at a dangerous angle. If Juno's hands weren't

secured-- a sure sign that he'd been thrashing in the hospital bed-- he'd have fixed them for her.

"Hey," He said quietly. He wasn't sure if his voice was quiet from the disuse or if he was just hoping Rita wouldn't wake up quite yet. "Hey, Rita?"

Instead of his secretary's voice, the door to his hospital room was pushed open, revealing Alessandra Strong holding her comms in one hand and a to-go cup of coffee in the other. For a split second, she looked shocked that Juno was even alive, but the expression was quickly schooled.

"Steel."

"...Strong. What are you doing here?" He asked, his voice creaky.

"Good morning to you too. How'd that ancient Martian artefact taste?"

"Some wake up-- wait, how did you--"

"Before you ask me how I know you ate an extremely dangerous pill, please realize that you are in a hospital right now and someone probably had to drag your thrill-seeking ass here." Her glare was intense, and for a moment Juno was glad he didn't care that much about his wellbeing or else he'd probably have been scared. "So? How was your little nap, then?"

"Yeah about that, how long was I out?"

“This’ll be…” She made a show of fishing her comms back out of the pocket she’d just placed it in moments before. “Day three of your hospital visit. Do you like your suite? I’m told you got a deal for being a regular.”

He gave her a dry look as she gestured with her cup of coffee to the vaguely dirty hospital chair and plain white walls.

“Very funny.” Juno raised an eyebrow at her, unimpressed. “Any chance a lady can get out of here without the doctors noticing? I’d rather not spend more time here than necessary.

“Your wrists are strapped to a bed, you’ve been nearly comatose for three days, your arm is more tube than arm at this point, and you’re asking me if I’ll sneak you out of here.” If Juno thought his tone was dry, Alessandra’s was like a mouthful of sand. “One of the two of us started this job out with a pill in their pocket, and the other ended it with the pill inside their stomach, and I’d like you to start explaining how abouts that happened. Tell me something I’ll like and I won’t wake Rita up right now.

He hesitated. Her eyebrows raised.

“Y’know, I was starting to like you, Steel.”

“That was your first mistake. I’m really not worth your time.”

“Is there someone else?” She said, soft in the carefree way that came with already knowing the answer to the question she was asking.

“I-- I can’t stop thinking about him. You remind me--” Juno stumbled over his words, surprising himself by even speaking about the thief.

“I’d rather you didn’t start with that, thanks though.” Her face was carefully blank as she looked at him. Slowly, she leaned over and kissed him on the forehead. “You’re an idiot, Juno Steel.”

And with that, Alessandra Strong walked out of the peeling yellow door and his life-- But not before kicking the leg of Rita’s chair on her way out. Rita startled awake as the door clicked closed behind Alessandra just as quietly as Juno would’ve expected it to.

Rita woke up loudly. She gasped, startled by the jolt of the chair, and then shot upright as soon as her eyes were open. Her hands clasped around his wrist, sharp pink nails not hurting as much as Juno might’ve thought they would. Those things really did look sharp.

“Mistah Steel! You’re awake! Oh my *gods,* you won’t *believe* what these doctors have been telling me!” The light bouncing off of Rita’s eyes was warm amber and gold. He smiled. “Mistah Steel? Sir, why’re you smilin’ at me like that?”

“Just happy to see you is all.”

“Likely story! Personally, I think you’re hoping I won’t get to lecturin’ you about swallowing a mysterious pill from an ancient civilization, but I think you’ll find that I’ve got all the time in the world and you’re still stuck here with tubes in you. Not going anywhere near as I can tell. Now then--”

Rita’s lipstick was violet. Juno laughed.

“It’s good to be back in the land of the living.” He sighed. “Rita, can you help me convince the nurse to let me out of here?”

“I swear, boss, if you weren’t paying me well, I would tell them to strap you in tighter.” Rita grumbled, but she was already reaching for the ‘call’ button on the side of his bed.

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

thank you so much for reading!!!!!!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The hallway outside of Juno's apartment was dark and he was truly exhausted. He'd spent the day getting beaten around trying to solve a would-be murder case while saving Vicky's ungrateful ass, and he was extremely ready to be unconscious. The click of his door was music to his tired ears, and he felt his face turn up slightly into a bit of a weary smile. His own clothes hadn't been returned to him, so he'd draped his suit jacket over his arm along with the purple patterned tie that he'd woken up in earlier that evening.

With the door opened, he sighed and dropped the clothes he was holding in a heap on the floor. He didn't really care if anything got wrinkled. It wasn't as though he was going to be wearing any of it again, so he didn't see why it mattered. The flick of his lightswitch flooded his foyer is warm golden light that reflected off of… two panes of glass spectacles across the room.

"Hello, Detective Steel, it's been a while."

Juno blinked at the thief in disbelief before thunking the back of his head against his front door. The light seemed brighter than usual and it pierced into his head right behind his eye. It never stopped, did it?

"Nureyev. What do you want?" He demanded, ignoring the faux-wounded intake of breath he heard from the shadow draped over his couch cushions.

“I’m hurt, Detective. Is it not possible that I missed my beloved accomplice?”

“One: I’m not an accomplice, and I’m certainly not beloved.” Juno spat, his fingers coming up to form quotes around the words. “And two: There is not a chance in hell you would consider coming back here if you didn’t need something. Why do you have to make it my business again?”

“Oh we’re getting right to business then? If you insist.” Nureyev uncrossed his legs and stood to his full height. “To be fair to me, it wasn’t my idea to get in touch. That burden lies on *your* shoulders, I’m afraid.”

“When in the world would I have gotten in touch with you?”

“Sorry, my mistake. It must have been the *other* Juno Steel, Private Investigator, that one Valles Vicky contacted me about. I’ll just see myself out. How embarrassing” Nureyev rolled his perfect eyes. The sarcasm dripped through his voice.

“Wait-- Valles Vicky? *You’re* Vicky’s contact!?”

“As far as I’m aware, I was the person she called, yes.”

“Oh, can it.” Juno grimaced. “This can’t be happening.”

“Well, how unfortunate for you that it is. Pick up your coat and give me your keys please, Detective. We have a long night ahead of us.”

The light glinting off his key was incredibly bright. Juno had no idea why, but with all the light glinting, it was starting to feel as though he was incredibly hungover. His temple hurt, his brain pounding in his skull and emanating out toward his right eye.

After spending time with Peter Nureyev, thief extraordinaire, Juno came to realize that being around Nureyev just *hurt* . Nureyev made everything seem somehow so much brighter than it usually was, as though his brain was constantly on the verge of tipping over into sensory overload. He was hyper-aware of all of the colours surrounding him in a way that he'd never experienced before in his life.

Engstrom's midnight blue suit seemed to be swirling with different shades just like the sickly grey cloud of smoke puffing from Valencia's golden cigarette holder. Valencia's dark fuschia dress was slinky and made out of a shiny fabric that made the light kaleidoscope away from it slightly. With his focus splintered as it was, paying attention to the surely fascinating card game going on in front of him was exceedingly difficult. The roses on Juno's suit were grey and pink. Peter's nails were painted violet. Everything was so loud--

"Detective Steel, would you mind passing me a drink?" Engstrom's words filtered into his passive brain while he traced the velvety pattern of the cushioned walls.

"Get it yourself--" He answered before processing the question. His head snapped back to look at Engstrom. "...What did you just call me?"

"Oh, did I let something slip?" Engstrom laughed with cold unblinking eyes. Peter's arm around his waist tightened, his nails digging into the thick fabric of the suit.

“I see the game has changed some.” He said, glare obvious in his voice even though it wasn’t present in his eyes.

When they picked up the game once more, Juno attempted to pay the cards more attention, but he was still entirely lost. The only constant was the fact that Nureyev was losing-- and losing badly. Juno was getting nervous. Engstrom was very clear about the punishment of losing or cheating, and Juno wasn’t too thrilled to be used as bait. When Nureyev dragged him off for a lecture in the washroom, Juno was jumpy and sensitive enough that he was one step away from bursting into tears, starting a fight, or trying to kiss the thief where he stood. His glasses matched his nails. His head hurt. Nureyev was lecturing him about acting out when his identity was on the line.

“You pick up a new name with your groceries every week. I don’t see what the deal is!” Juno crossed his arms across his chest and rolled his eyes-- ouch. His foot was tapping the tile floor at an impossible pace. Nureyev tilted his head dryly.

“Word of advice, Detective: It isn’t very kind to tell someone that their gift to you is worthless.” Nureyev’s voice was clipped. Juno tried to interject, but Nureyev steamrolled over him. “That name is important to me, but it also ties me directly to some… things I would much rather leave behind me.”

“I don’t trust you,” Juno said through the ache in his temple.

“I’m not asking you to believe me. I’m asking you to trust me. I trust you already, and I need you to please return the favour for both of our sakes.” The lights were blindingly bright emphasizing the colour in Nureyev’s suit, covered in grey and pink flowers to match Juno’s. “Detective, what is *wrong* with you?”

Juno squinted his eyes shut and shook his head sharply, only

succeeding in causing more pain rather than lessening it. “I’ve got a migraine the size of Mercury. It’s nothing.”

He couldn’t be sure he was even fully *there* for the rest of their conversation, but he did know he’d promised to solve this. Engstrom was cheating, Juno was a detective, and he was going to solve this if for no other reason than the fact that he’d really liked to go back to his room to take something to make the pounding in his head stop.

It took a few tries to have any success at all. Nureyev was still losing badly, and Engstrom was getting impatient. There was only so much time to solve this case. Blinking hard, Juno rubbed his fingers roughly against his forehead as though he could massage the pain away. He focused his attention rapt on the violet cards laying on the table. Valencia was standing behind Nureyev so she could see his cards, but how in the world was she getting the information to Engstrom.

Slowly, Juno meandered over to stand in front of Valencia, just to test out a theory. Immediately, the opponents were up in arms. Okay. That was something. The smell of burning filtered through his senses, making his throat close up slightly and his head hurt just that much more. Nureyev shot him a pointed glance that said he’d better wrap this up soon. The light from above them glinted off the golden cigarette holder directly into his eye and a burst of pain was accompanied by an echoing thought that didn’t fit quite right in his head.

It needs to make smoke! It can’t take that kind of heat.

Juno shook his head as the pain crescendoed behind his eye.

We’ll have to make it work.

“Feeling alright there, detective? Your nose is bleeding.” Valencia drawled with so little care in her voice Juno almost didn’t register he’d been asked anything. He brought his hand up and wiped at his nose which, true to form, came away wet with blood. Huh.

“Yeah, I’m fine. Just like my Duke said, I get a bit antsy. Mind if I have a smoke?” He asked, not waiting for the answer before he snatched the glinting cigarette holder from her grasp.

“Hey-- No give that back!”

“Or what?”

“Put my assistant’s possessions down *now,* Detective.”

“Can do!” Juno said feeling nearly gleeful as he snapped the object over his knee. Valencia flinched back as Engstrom clutched at his ear in obvious pain, ripping out what had previously appeared to be a hearing aid of some sort. “Never seen this strain of tobacco before. Have you, Rose?”

Nureyev stood up, looming over Engstrom where he was sitting, trusting Juno to take care of Valencia. Juno grabbed onto her arms, twisting them around behind her back. “Why no, Detective Steel, I can’t say I ever have. Now, Engstrom, I’m going to assume you weren’t listening to the evening news through that little earpiece there?” He clicked his tongue disapprovingly. “And you were *so clear* about the punishments for cheating, too. Juno, dear, you wouldn’t mind looking away, would you? I’m going to stab Mr. Engstrom now.”

“Kill me?” Engstrom laughed with only a twinge of nerves in his voice, “If you kill me you’ll have no idea how to get on that godsforsaken train and then all of this would be for nothing.”

“He does have a point, Juno, doesn’t he?” Nureyev asked, blasé.

“Well, he does, but just like he mentioned earlier. There are lots worse things *worse* than death.”

“Ooh, you raise an interesting point, Juno!”

“I’m sure the Oasis wouldn’t be incredibly stoked if their star ticket was revealed to be a cheater and a fraud.”

“No I’m sure they wouldn’t, would they? Bad publicity, you understand”

“You wouldn’t dare,” Engstrom said, more affected by the threat of a ruined reputation than an attempt at his life.

“You know, I think we would” Juno tightened his grip on Valencia’s arms slightly, making her wince. Engstrom hesitated for a moment, holding his gaze.

“Fine, fine, get off me. Listen closely because I will *only* be saying this once. The train slows down once a week to intercept shipments. The next time this is meant to occur is tomorrow at 5 o’clock sharp.”

“And the coordinates? Didn’t think we’d forget those, did you, Engstrom?” Nureyev jiggled the knife he was holding and Engstrom nearly growled.

“Fine. Fine! Give me your damn comms.” He wrote the coordinates down and threw the comms roughly at Nureyev who easily caught it with a sharp smirk.

The pain in Juno’s head was still as present as ever, if not sharper after figuring the pair out. He couldn’t help his mood when the pair left and walked back to their room. They argued, quietly on Juno’s part due to the fact that it felt like a blaster bolt to the head every time he raised his voice even slightly. Juno was not pleased to be used as a bargaining chip, and his ideal afternoon wasn’t often spent sitting down to a death threat, but Nureyev didn’t seem to understand this. The light in the hallways was yellow and blindingly bright. He could still feel the blood on his upper lip crusty and dry now that the nosebleed had stopped. Nureyev was a master at rolling his eyes and brushing off Juno.

As the thief prepared to sleep, Juno hung back in the hallway to phone Rita. The call went through to voicemail. Instead of crying, he thumped his head against the wall. “Rita, I don’t know when I’ll be back-- Hell I don’t know if I *will* be back. Just… take care of yourself alright? Please? Sell the office, the money is yours. There’s a safe under my desk at my place, everything there is yours. I’m sorry.”

Flickers of pink and yellow light danced behind his eyelids, pain lancing up and down his neck, as he laid down in the bed as far away from Peter Nureyev as he could physically be without falling off the edge.

Sarah Steel’s voice filtered through Juno’s dreams and was roughly interrupted by a voice he’d never heard before sifting through his subconscious like ink in water.

1111…..1112….1113….

The cool trickle of blood on Juno's face woke him up enough to snap open his eyes. Who the hell…

Carts loaded, set to kill

The voice sang inside his head. Brow furrowed, Juno sat up slowly, looking around the darkness of the room while one hand reached over to pat the bed next to Nureyev's sleeping body. Kill?

"Nureyev, get up!" He whispered loudly.

Make it quick. Make it quiet!

Giving up on the sleeping man beside him, Juno slipped out of the bed and over to his coat. In the darkness, it was hard to find the chair where he'd draped it, but he knew his coat inside and out and found his blaster immediately. The door creaked open silhouetting a figure very slightly in the sliver of washed-out yellow light leaking in from the hall.

Look and them here sleeping--

The blast of the laser Juno shot was loud enough that it shocked Nureyev, who sat bolt upright in bed and began fumbling around for his glasses. The light beside the bed was flipped on before the person had even thumped to the ground. The room was cold in the hazy morning. With the room now awash with golden light, Juno realized he was still crouched on the ground next to the chair wearing only a t-shirt and his boxers. He sprung up and quickly began to dress.

"Juno, what the hell happened? Who's that?"

“Hell if I know. Get dressed, there’s probably more people coming.”

“Did they hurt you?”

“No, I stunned them as soon as they walked in.”

“Are you sure? You have blood all over your face.”

“Oh. Must’ve had another nosebleed.”

“It’s all the way up near your eye though--”

“Nureyev, what about *we have to leave* did you *not understand.”* Juno threw the thief’s duffel bag onto the bed so it landed next to him.

Juno’s head was hurting when he went to bed the night before and it was still aching now as he did up his belt buckle. Not taking a moment to wipe the blood of his face, he turned all of his focus away from the words coming out of Nureyev’s mouth so he wouldn’t be surprised by any more of Engstrom’s goons deciding to pay a visit. The pair leapt out the window as a knock came to their door with another voice accompanying it. The thief led him down a garbage chute, through a few hallways obviously meant for cleaning staff, and to a large garage all while he explained how Engstrom had obviously not given them the correct coordinates. Juno didn’t know what he’d been expecting, honestly. He wanted to go back to bed.

Inside the garage was a sleek grey car, all alone.

“Why did you come all this way just for a car? Mine is literally parked out front right now!”

“I would barely call that scrap metal a car, Detective”

“Excuse me? It works perfectly fine!”

“The inspection is three years out of date!”

“I’m from Hyperion City. Do you think anyone actually cares about things like that?”

“I don’t have time for this. We are *not* taking that death trap with us. Besides, I’ve been wanting to get my hands on this lovely thing for a while now.”

The dazzling license plate on the back of the vehicle read “RUBY7”.

Wait.

“Is this Engstrom’s car?” Juno started to say before he was interrupted by a voice at the door of the garage.

“You two! Step away from the vehicle and put your hands up!”

“Step to, detective!” Nureyev sang before hopping in the driver’s seat.

“What do you mean!?” Juno yelped incredulously as he ran to join Nureyev inside the car “The garage door is closed still. How are you planning on getting out of this one?”

“Well you see, Detective, this car is capable of very many interesting things. One such thing, which I think you’ll find will be useful right now, is that Ms. Ruby here can drive quite fast enough to shatter that door there. Now be a dear and ask Ruby for the actual coordinates of the train.”

Juno couldn’t say he was incredibly on board with killing the guards but even he had to admit that the rush he received from the speed of the car was truly exhilarating. The hot orange sun beat down on the side of the car making strange blue-grey spots in the reflection along the metal flank. With the gun in his hand and trust in his marksmanship, Juno couldn’t help but let out a slightly manic laugh as a hoard of Engstrom’s men pulled up behind them in cars of their own. Peter’s snarky grin was in full effect as he pushed the Ruby faster and faster along the desert, orange dust kicking up all around them while black cars filled with goons tried their best to catch up.

Looking back, Everything seemed to go so fast. The train, Valencia, the gas nearly choking him to death, the egg, the… the voice from his head all those months ago standing in front of him as her men held guns to his thief’s head. The woman had sagging skin that looked almost as though it was pinned onto a skeleton. Her face was framed nicely by sheets of greasy greying hair. Her dress was a tasteful yellow that made Juno want to throw up.

“We meet at last, Juno Steel.”

There was no obvious way to tell time inside of an ancient martian tomb. Everything was hazy. The majority of Juno’s waking hours were

spent in agony. After ‘working with’ Miasma for a while, the world had shifted slightly. It felt almost as though he had hit his head in a specifically strange way or as though he’d been unconscious after a fight for just a minute too long. The world around him was tinted the strangest warping shade of purple. The shade wasn’t concrete. If Juno had to pin it, he’d say it varied between the blue-ish indigo of an old bruise and the haunting lilac of the pearl earrings his mother used to wear before Jack stopped coming by.

Juno wasn’t sure he had the wherewithal to properly process Peter Nureyev. It was the most time he’d ever spent with the man, but he was so *bright* . The walls inside the Martian tomb were grey. The floor inside the Martian tomb was grey. The door leading out of the Martian tomb was grey. Everything was grey, but somehow Peter Nureyev made the grey feel like a rainbow. There was many a night after Miasma’s tests that even looking at Nureyev made his eyes well up with unshed tears. He spent a lot of time sitting quietly with his eyes closed as Peter Nureyev held him gently.

The problem with Peter Nureyev was not how loud he made grey. The problem was that when Juno was forced to look inside the thief’s mind, the man was so mind-splittingly radiant that it hurt. It felt as though Nureyev had taken a megaphone to the handful of colours that Juno knew, and it hurt. It didn’t help that with the world shifting between reality and… purple.

“Juno, can I ask what’s wrong, or is that a stupid question right now.”

Peter’s voice filtered into Juno’s thoughts, shaking him from his reverie. Two of Miasma’s men had had to drag him back to their cell by his arms after the last session which had left him entirely weak and almost unconscious. He’d been staring unblinkingly at the wall for what felt like hours. Apparently, Nureyev had cleaned the blood off his cheek at some point. He should thank him.

“Nureyev, do you see colours?” Juno said instead. He was tired. He

was tired of staring into this man's head for hours on end. He was tired of being in pain all the time.

"Juno…?"

"I'm just wondering. You don't have to tell me if you don't want." *Trying to make conversation to distract me from you* he didn't say. A moment passed.

"Mmm...it's hard to say." Peter sighed and gestured for Juno to come over to sit with him. "I can see a few, but it's something I try to avoid. Why?"

"Which ones do you have?" Juno stumbled over to where Peter was sitting with his back against the wall and nearly collapsed into the other man's shoulder. "If you don't mind me asking"

"I, uh. I-- Red." Peter cleared his throat "and purple. Not much room for meeting soulmates in this profession."

"Do you really put much stock into that stuff?"

"Well, red came from a man who was very important to me when I was a child. Unfortunate colour to come with him, to be frank."

"And purple?" Juno asked, his eyelids heavy and painful. Peter audibly hesitated as he brought a hand up to play with Juno's hair.

"...The purple would be from… you, detective."

Suddenly, Juno was a lot more awake than he was moments before. His brain flashed back to his apartment bedroom, lying in bed with Diamond.

“Nureyev, I--”

“I’ve already guessed that my colour isn’t reciprocated, don’t worry.”

“It’s not-- It’s just-- You’re different, though,” Juno said. Everything was incredibly foggy and Juno was having an incredibly hard time trying to focus on anything.

“I don’t think I’m following.”

“You’re right I don’t have a… colour from you, but you’re still different.” It felt slightly like e couldn’t be sure he was actually making sense, “You make things brighter. I don’t know what it is, but when I’m with you it’s like all the colours I can see got dialled up to eleven and I can’t focus on anything else. You’re just so… bright. I don’t know, sorry, my head hurts.”

“Oh, Juno… Come here.” Peter pulled Juno’s head up slightly to press a kiss in his hair. “We’re going to get out of here, okay?”

“I don’t know how you can be so confident about that.”

“I have to be. We will.”

Peter continued lightly scratching Juno's hair, making him fall asleep against the thief's shoulder once more.

Suffice it to say, Juno's head hurt intensely a lot of the time he was in the tomb. The memories he had from the tomb seemed to come at him like snapshots from an old camera. He remembered pain for sure, and he remembered the glassy look of Miasma's goons and the feel of her too-sharp-too-fleshy fingers poking him sharply in the temples. He remembered Peter-- his hands softly petting his hair, Peter carefully wiping blood from his face, Peter's bright black eyes with tired blue undereye circles, Peter as a child holding a knife dripping with brilliant red blood as his father figure lay dying on the floor of a memory. Juno had never seen red before.

Nureyev left Juno in the cell, but more importantly, Nureyev *came back* for him. And they fought Miasma together. And won.

Juno's head was aching and there was blood sticky on the side of his face clinging to his facial hair. They won the fight. It didn't feel like they'd won the fight. Juno couldn't help but stare up at the purpling warped roof above him, unsure if he was seeing things. Nureyev's voice was quiet on the other side of the door and somehow even quieter as he kneeled down in front of Juno on the ground inside the chamber. Juno was tired. They had won.

Peter Nureyev held Juno in a dark hotel room hours later, holding him gently in case Juno needed to adjust the bandages around his head. The darkness was peaceful. Outside the cracked blinds on the window, Hyperion City glinted in shades of neon yellow, purple and pink and for once, the yellow Juno sees is neither muffled or desaturated. The navy blue dome crackled above with frigid rain. The orange dusty streets were, for once quiet. Peter Nureyev kissed him and the vision he still had left in his remaining eye took in what must have been fireworks.

Chapter End Notes

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End Notes

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